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Historical Commission Minutes 04-02-2002

Arlington Historical Commission
Minutes of the Meeting of Tuesday,
2 April 2002
Whittemore-Robbins House, 7:30 PM

Call to Order: Robert Botterio, presiding, with commissioners Jane Becker, Pam Meister, Eric Stange, Patrick Guthrie, and Michael Ruderman present.

Minutes of 5 March 2001: approved.

Communications from Mr. Botterio: demolition requests for review were received for the following properties, none of which is listed upon the Inventory, and therefore does not require our oversight: 15 Thesda Street, 56 Dow Avenue, 30 Water Street, 325 Park Avenue, and 101 Churchill Avenue.

Mr. Botterio also had a discussion with the contractor the contractor engaged by the Winchester Country Club to demolish the tennis building, 20-30 year old structure next to the tennis courts on the club's grounds at 468 Mystic Street. Mr. Botterio thought the building insignificant, and that demolition should proceed without further review. While agreeing in his assessment of the building, several commissioners, in particular Ms. Meister, felt the demolition delay bylaw required a hearing for any dwelling or business structure upon a listed address. Therefore, Mr. Botterio will inform the club that they may schedule a formal hearing for our next meeting May 7 to discuss the demolition.

Review of Projects

125 Brattle Lane/Farmer's Lane (Colonial Ridge LLC) 11/99: Ruderman, for Robinson: work crews have returned to this building's interior. However, the windows are vinyl and not true divided lights. Ms. Robinson shall investigate.

1167 Mass. Ave. (Mirak) 9/00: Guthrie-completion is 6-8 months overdue.

23 Maple Street (Town of Arlington) 11/00: Robinson, Guthrie-no activity, may be a dropped project.

45 Fairview Avenue (Trvalik) 12/00: Mr. Bruce Trvalik appeared with revised plans (principally, a slightly recessed third-story window) and requested approval for the whole, delayed project, as revised: granted. One-year period for completion starts anew.

9 Brantwood Road (Stainton) 5/01: Botterio-completed, and off the agenda.

30 Academy Street [f. 20 Pelham Terrace] (McKee) 11/01: Ms. Robinson will review the plans for a change to the door facing Pelham Terrace.

24 Gray Street (V. Brown, W. Stewart) 12/01: Stange-almost completed.

35 Bailey Road (Weil): Guthrie-work begins this month.

32 Draper Avenue (R. Kingston, R. Feinbaum) 3/02: Ruderman- not begun yet.

Demolitions Pending

7 Brattle Court (Freedom Development): August 1, 2001

5 Brattle Court (Freedom Development): November 8, 2001

Both structures demolished; the latter, which was to have been the one moved to Franklin Street, on March 30, 2002.

Ramifications of failure to secure the preservation of a building that had an unoccupied lot waiting for it?

Upon receiving the copy of the agenda for this meeting, Arlington's webmaster Bob Sprague wrote to this clerk:

>I will be eager to know why the Brattle demo team took down two houses, instead of one.<

Let my summary for him stand as the record or our discussions of April 2. Your clerk answered:

Here's what Bob Botterio sent to members of the commission last Friday before it came down (with my interpolations):

"I have talked at length to Mr. Nyberg. He feels very frustrated and has decided not to continue his efforts to move the house. The short story is that Mr. Veo, (principal of Freedom Development-AMR) the current owner will not communicate with Mr. Nyberg and now wants to knock down the house (perhaps because of all the delays so far, or the 18 months of ill will he's been dealing with, undeserved in this case, as a notorious "my way, or Chapter 40-B way" developer, or perhaps because no one asked for his permission on the two recent occasions when the prep carpenters and the mover's riggers started sawing porches off the main frame of 7 Brattle, and punching holes in its foundation for the insertion of lifting steel I-beams!-AMR).

After talking to the building inspector quite some time ago I received a call last Friday saying it was not a buildable lot because of the house next door having a overhang over the lot. Monday, Mr. Nyberg met with the building inspector and he agreed that it indeed was a buildable lot. on Monday about 35 people from the neighborhood where the house was to be moved to came to the selectman's meeting in protest and talked to Jack Herd. Tuesday, the building inspector informed Mr. Nyberg that he could not move the house unless there was a foundation to move it on to."

Bob goes on to say, "Talked to John Maher who said I should contact the town manager. I left a message. I talked to Jack Herd who said that the selectman were affected by the outpour of concerns from neighbors especially that they could have a house sitting on beams for a long time and had no idea where the house was being placed. These concerns led the selectman to recommend to the town manager that the house not be moved unless it was to be moved to a foundation. I suspect that the town manager told the building inspector and he did what he was told to do"

That's a specious reason for delaying a move. The house is in no danger, and poses no danger to anyone, if it sits on timbers for a while next to the future foundation site. It's done this way all the time. You can't dig a standard foundation for an antique house anyway-it's got to be a tailored fit, and the simplest way is to have the old house right there to measure as the crew digs.

Root cause of the protest? Can't say for sure, but I lean towards thinking that, after presuming for decades that the Franklin Street lot in question was unbuildable, certain neighbors wanted to keep it that way. And to keep the most people the happiest, the selectmen went with crowd. What will they think when Mr. Nyberg builds a new house on the same lot?

On the same Monday night that the protest was hitting the selectmen, I was at the Redev. Bd. hearing. As Alan McClennen was explaining the current situation to them, it was all but a done deal. My notes to the HComm on that meeting:

"I was at the Redev. Bd. hearing Monday night, and it sounded, according to Mr. McClennen, like the move was a go except for the final details being worked out between Mr. Nyberg (the lot owner) and the Building Dept. On the record of the meeting, he only alluded to a problem. When I asked him after the meeting, he suggested it was the overhang of the existing building's encroaching upon the lot line of the presently vacant lot. Since it was only a rear cornice that is encroaching, it could be taken care of, as Mr. McClennen told me, quoting from Mr. Nyberg, with either a variance "or a chainsaw."

In either case, the move route was set (Dudley Street to Grove, to Mass. Ave., to Medford Street, to Franklin Street), the utility workers were scheduled, abutting owners had all been sent letters explaining the move and the brief interruptions in electrical service that some of them would experience, and on Tuesday representatives of the town (I missed the names) would hand-deliver notices of the move to all the residents on the route-just in case there were tenants who had not been informed by their landlords. It certainly seemed like "a done deal", and one with far better public notice than 48 Broadway to Pleasant Street 5 (?) years ago."

So it all changed last Monday night/Tuesday morning, and the deal was off. You really can't blame Freedom Development, since they had been biding their time since, and watching the construction economy change grossly, August of last year, after promising us, in so many words, that the buildings would both come down on the day the demo delay ran out.

The HComm's plan now is to try to pull together a meeting of all the town parties to this situation, and design a common plan for future house moves, one that works out all the concerns in advance, and avoids having such nasty surprises erupt at the last hour.

962 Massachusetts Avenue (Rita Yegian, owner): November 8, 2001-no information.

Reports

Whittemore-Robbins House (and outbuildings): Carey-no change.

Arlington Civic Block Garden: Robinson-no report.

Updates and Expansion to Inventory: Meister, Guthrie, Stange-information expected from Mr. Richard Duffy by May.

New Business

8:00 pm: Formal Hearing: 3-5 Brattle Street (Arthur Fertman, owner; Michael Goodwin, builder)

The 1790 Baptist Society Meetinghouse was copied architecturally from older meetinghouses on Lexington Common, Mr. Goodwin began, with the intention of lending an aura of permanence and validity to the new congregation. In the 1880s or 1890s it was moved from its original location on the corner of the present Brattle Street and Massachusetts Avenue to Pleasant Street, and converted to a two-family home. In the 1920s it returned, slightly behind where it once stood, and now turned toward Brattle.

Mr. Goodwin presented further research on the construction techniques and materials used in the meetinghouse, and the extensive amount of repair and renovation that was needed.

The Commission voted 6-0 in favor (Commissioners Becker, Guthrie, Stange, Meister, Botterio, and Ruderman in favor; Robinson absent) of the plans drawn by Michael Goodwin on behalf of the owner Arthur Fertman for renovations to 3-5 Brattle Street (which are incorporated by reference in this decision).

These plans call for work to the central rectangular mass of the building dating from 1790 as follows: the use of "Hardie Plank" or the equivalent synthetic clapboard with a 4-inch reveal; wooden reproductions of the trim, eaves, rakes, soffits, fascia, gutters, and cornerboards; rebuilt windows as drawn with wooden sills, muntons, bands and moldings; rebuilt chimneys with modern brick to emulate the look of antique brick, two low-profile skylights in the front roof and two in the back roof.

The posts of the rebuilt rear porches may be covered in "Celtec" or equivalent synthetic material, but the railings will be fabricated in wood to a suitable "colonial" profile. Foundation brick will be left as it is presently, painted gray, and the bulkhead designated for removal in the rear may be removed.

Mr. Stange will monitor the work for the Commission. Before leaving this topic, the commission thanked Mr. Goodwin for his extensive research on the structure in preparing for this meeting, and invited him back at any time as an associate commissioner to assist with other projects.

In other new business, Mr. Ruderman reported that the Historic Massachusetts, Inc. annual conference scheduled for April 6, 2002 had been cancelled, due to a lack of enrollment. The commission also decided to no position on the article which comes before Town Meeting in three weeks, that which asks the Selectmen to petition the Legislature for a Home Rule bill enabling the "special places" protections devised by the Zoning Bylaw review Committee.

Next meeting confirmed for May 7, 2002, and this meeting closed at 10:40pm.

For the Arlington Historical Commission,
A. Michael Ruderman, Clerk